



# THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

*Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource – Employees*

Call EAS: Olympia (360) 753-3260 Seattle (206) 281-6315 Spokane (509) 482-3686

Website: <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

■ Q. My employee broke her finger. A doctor's note restricted her ability to function, so she has been on light duty for four weeks. I am concerned because she says her doctor does not know when she will be able to return to full duty. Can EAS help?

A. Determine whether your organization has a procedure for managing employees who have sudden, temporary restrictions on their essential work functions because of medical problems. If such a procedure does not exist, consult with EAS. With the employee's permission, EAS could speak with her doctor about the restrictions, prognosis, and anticipated return to full duty. With permission limited information could then be given to you by EAS. Doctors typically specify the length of time for work restrictions, particularly after follow-up appointments. Your employee was hired to perform the essential duties of her position. If the restrictions continued indefinitely, you could be forced to consider administrative options and the extent to which she is qualified for her job. Talk to your HR to consider the applicability of the Americans With Disabilities Act in your decisions.

■ Q. I am a newly hired director. I have discovered that a few long-term employees have obvious performance problems. One employee arrives on time, but socializes until noon before doing anything. Is he testing my limits, or has this behavior been acceptable?

A. You may be faced with the work habits of an employee that have been tolerated by the previous manager. The acceptance of such a work habit would explain why it is continuing after your arrival. It is less likely that he is simply testing you. Once you are sure of the work pattern, it is best to meet with your employee to find out why he is behaving this way. You can then ask that the behavior not continue. Be prepared for an explanation that your employee may find reasonable, but that you may find unacceptable. Consider a short discussion of your view and changes you would like him to make, rather than suddenly becoming heavy-handed. This is particularly true if the previous manager - and thus indirectly the organization - supported this behavior. Elicit the employee's agreement to make the change and expect it to take place.

■ Q. I have had many corrective discussions with my employee and have referred him to EAS. Things have not changed. Where do I go from here, to avoid taking disciplinary action? Is there any other intervention that might solve the problem?

A. Using a progressive disciplinary process is the answer. There are several steps to increase the level of concern and attempt to get your employee to take responsibility for the job deficiencies. Your EAS professional, along with your Human Resource Consultant, will work with you to understand the process where you work. There are specific steps that give your employee the greatest opportunity to improve, before having to take any sort of disciplinary action. In some cases, discipline is necessary to resolve the problem. Remember, the employee is ultimately responsible for his or her job performance, and to address personal issues that may impact that performance.

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■ Q. After being promoted to supervisor, one employee confronted me saying he would not make changes in his work habits. He added, "I only have two years until retirement, and you can't do anything to me." Is he right?

A. As a supervisor, you have certain responsibilities to your employee and to the organization. This reality won't change, despite what your employee said or how close to retirement he might be. An angry or troubled employee close to retirement may believe he is immune to the consequences of unsatisfactory performance, but few employees will test such a belief in a way that could lead to termination. The risk is too great. Indeed, although many organizations may be reluctant to take adverse actions against long-term employees, none have policies to preclude them. Check with your next level supervisors and Human Resources to establish your organization is committed to providing the support you deserve, and expect your employee to cooperate with management and follow established work rules. You could not expect support from your organization if you acted otherwise.

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■ Q. When referring to EAS, how much assistance in making the appointment should I give to the employee? What different things can I do to make it easier?

A. Although a supervisor referral could be accomplished by simply providing the employee with the EAS phone number, you are encouraged to contact your EAS office, first. Discuss your situation with EAS and how best to proceed. Your EAS Professional is there to help you assess your employee's overall performance, and how to most effectively intervene. You can determine whether a formal referral is appropriate. Formal referrals allow you to know if an employee referred for job-related concerns had an appointment with EAS. Never view taking a reasonable step to assist the employee in making an EAP appointment as "enabling" or "taking responsibility away" from the employee.

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**NOTES:**

Visit EAS on our website at:  
<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

